R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 083 RE 000 246

A WORKSHOP APPROACH TO READING PROBLEMS.

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PUB DATE 4 MAY 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.52 11P.

DESCRIPTORS- *INSERVICE EDUCATION, *SUMMER INSTITUTES, *INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT, *READING INSTRUCTION, *ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS, PRACTICUMS, READING IMPROVEMENT, CLARKE COLLEGE NDEA INSTITUTE IN READING, CLARKE COLLEGE, DUBUQUE, IOWA,

CLARKE COLLEGE IN DUBUQUE, IOWA, INITIATED AN NDEA SUMMER INSTITUTE IN READING IN 1965 TO UP GRADE ELEMENTARY READING INSTRUCTION AND TO CHECK UNDERACHIEVEMENT AMONG ITS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN. THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED WITH WORD RECOGNITION, TECHNIQUES OF QUESTIONING, COMPREHENSION, STUDY SKILLS, CRITICAL READING, CREATIVE READING, READING READINESS, AND THE LANGUAGE ARTS WERE STUDIED. ACTIVITIES AT THE INSTITUTE INCLUDED RESEARCH WORK BY THE PARTICIPANTS, DISCUSSIONS OF LECTURES GIVEN BY READING EXPERTS, OBSERVATION-DEMONSTRATIONS, EVALUATIONS OF CURRENT THEORIES AND INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS, AND THE PRACTICUM. THE PRACTICUM PROVIDED EXPERIENCES IN TEACHING DEVELOPMENTAL READING, READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS, DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING IN GROUP SITUATIONS, AND THE USE OF A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS WITH LEARNERS OF DIFFERENT ABILITIES. THE PARTICIPANTS EVALUATED THEIR EXPERIENCES TWICE--ONCE AT THE END OF THE INSTITUTE AND AGAIN THE FOLLOWING DECEMBER. THE RESPONSES WERE GENERALLY FAVORABLE. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (NS)

ED015083

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RE 000 246

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SYMPOSIUM V--IMPROVING TEACHER EDUCATION

NDEA Institutes

Thursday, May 4, 2:30-3:45 p.m.

The first step in beginning most worthwhile educational endeavors is the discovery of a need. This, too, was the beginning of the Clarke College NDEA Institute in Reading.

The summer of 1965 found the faculty at Clarke College greatly concerned about the educational development of elementary school children. A study of test data revealed that many children were not achieving according to their potential. This was especially true in reading, yet reading is

the backbone of the whole elementary structure. Why did this situation exist? What did the education of reading teachers, or the lack of it, contribute to this problem?

STUDY

To discover answers to this question, Clarke College conducted a study in July, 1965. Data were collected from a sample of 215 qualified elementary school teachers from 19 states and 77 cities. From this study the following facts emerged.

One hundred four of the 215 teachers in the survey had never had a formal reading course. One hundred had one, and only eleven had two or more. Of the 111 teachers in the study who had one or more courses in reading, 69 of them had no refresher courses in the last 10 to 25 years. Yet 202 of the 215 teachers questioned taught reading in the elementary school.

Out of ten approaches to reading being used in various places at the present time, 60 of the 215 teachers in the survey felt able to evaluate two, approximately 55 could evaluate three, and less than 18 were familiar enough with four or more of the methods to attempt any kind of evaluation.

Out of the ten rather widely advertised mechanical aids to reading, such as the pacer and the tachistoscope, very few felt sufficiently informed to comment regarding their functional value. The most popular device in the survey, the Controlled Reader, was familiar to 75 teachers. The film projector as an adjunct to reading instruction was familiar to only 63, and the number familiar with the Craig Reader and the Language Master was 7 and 4 respectively.

From this study only one general conclusion could be drawn by a liberal arts institution devoted to teacher education: In-service education of

elementary teachers of reading was imperative. The Clarke College NDEA Institute in Reading was planned to fulfill the needs identified in this study.

PROGRAM

The findings of our study posed a great challenge. Participants in our Institute would be classroom teachers of reading who had antiquated or inadequate formal training. How could they learn new theory, techniques, and materials and actually be convinced that these could be instruments for more effective learning in their classrooms?

Our plan of attack was three fold. We would attempt 1) to create a desire for change in the participants, 2) to give them facility in using the tools capable of bringing about change, and 3) provide them with the opportunity to experience change in themselves and in the children in their classrooms.

The key would be involvement—involvement in theory, practice, and materials. From the first day of the institute we would try to stimulate the participants to raise questions, search for answers, exchange ideas, observe suitable models, demonstrate proper techniques, create new materials, and apply skills in classroom situations.

THEORY

How we used this functional approach can be illustrated best by pursuing one of the early problems the participants identified, "What is word recognition?" To answer this question we turned the participants loose in the curriculum library in teams of two or three. They were to make a comparative study of the word recognition programs in two recently published basal reading series of their choice. They were to discover the

kinds of word recognition skills to be taught to children, the point at which the teaching of each skill was introduced and terminated, the teaching techniques used for introducing them, the degree of continuity or lack of it in the development of each skill. Then the participants were to compare likenesses and differences between their two series.

Promptly the participants began to dig. And just as promptly they began to see themselves in their antiquated and uninformed ways. Discussions were lively, humorous, open and soul-searching. They quickly learned the meaning and role of sight words, context clues, phonetic and structural analysis as means to word recognition. They experienced the sequential development of skills or the lack of it in each basal series. They learned inductive and deductive methods of teaching word recognition. They also began to ask questions about why reading texts were designed as they were.

At this point, we guided participants into the professional reading books authored by the same men as the two series they had studied. Here they searched out the theoretical model the major author had used in writing the children's texts and identified the author's philosophy of word recognition.

Now the participants began to wonder how word recognition should be taught. They sought books and articles by the major authorities and tried to discover what part of each theory was based on opinion and what part was based on scientific research. Their findings were interesting and disconcerting!

As an attempt to order the information gleaned from this experience, each participant worked out a blueprint for his own philosophy of word recognition. What was his definition of word recognition? What skills were involved? When should they be taught? In what sequence? What role did they play in the total reading act?

The culminating activity to our study of word recognition was a study of formal and informal instruments available to help discover gaps in children's backgrounds and to identify specific needs. Also studied in an informal period each afternoon were most of the mechanical aids, skill-building "boxes", workbooks and games available for building these skills.

By the time the study of word recognition had been completed, so many questions had arisen concerning comprehension that the participants immediately began to pursue its study in the same manner. However, as an introduction to comprehension, questioning was studied in relation to its control of the expressive thought patterns and skills development of children. Emphases were given to questions eliciting literal, interpretive, critical, or creative answers. The questions offered in the teachers' manuals were identified and evaluated from these four viewpoints.

Topics studied throughout the summer in addition to those mentioned previously were: What are study skills? What is critical reading? What is creative reading? What is rate of comprehension? What are the language arts? What is reading readiness? Each was probed in varying degrees of depth, but all were approached on theoretical and practical levels. We began each new venture with a question, searched out the answers

as they were given in reading materials produced for children, studied the theoretical models used by reading authorities, evaluated their validity or lack of it according to scientific research, became acquainted with instruments available for assessing children's needs, and then produced statements delineating each participant's philosophy. Throughout all of the discussions there was constant interaction of staff with participants and participants with participants.

LECTURERS

At appropriate times during the summer, four guest lecturers highlighted particular areas which the participants were studying. Dolores Durkin addressed herself to readiness for reading, drawing from the riches of her own research on children who read before they came to school. H. Alan Robinson discussed reading study skills and impressed the participants with the fact that reading is not a separate subject to be taught at a particular time and a particular place, but is a process which must permeate each subject in the total curriculum. A. Sterl Artley stressed the importance of developing critical reading at all grade levels and illustrated this by working through a directed reading lesson on critical reading. Bill Martin demonstrated a literature approach to reading, showing the relationship that exists between language patterns and reading. He delighted everyone with his own ability to tell stories and involve his listeners in the telling. Each speaker's ability to communicate with the participants and his willingness to discuss problems met by classroom teachers in the teaching of reading added depth and purpose to the accomplishments of the Institute.

While our in-depth study of the fundamentals of reading was in progress we also examined current theories and approaches to reading and evaluated them in the light of available research. Each committee of four or five participants chose the approach it preferred and presented it to the group in some creative way. Each presentation portrayed what the approach was, the theoretical model on which it was based, the materials used in it, its advantages and disadvantages as an approach to the teaching of reading, and an evaluation according to available research. Approaches studied included basal reading, individualized reading, language experience, i t a, programmed reading, phonic, responsive environment, linguistic, neurological, and film.

It was during the discussions of our current approaches to reading that the real growth of the participants became evident. Initially they were concerned with trivia and superficialities. As the summer progressed unimportant issues were glossed over and basic essentials became the heart of their concern.

PRACTICUM

If changes in the participants' teaching behavior were to become a reality, they needed to experience change in themselves while teaching reading to children in their classrooms. The practicum was planned to provide such an opportunity.

The practicum involved seven classrooms, grades one through seven with fifteen to twenty children in each classroom. The pupils of grades one, three, five, and seven were children of average reading ability. Those in grades two, four, and six were superior children. The master

teachers, as well as the students, were from the Dubuque public and non-public schools. The regular principal of the school acted as coordinator.

Six participants worked daily in each classroom. Three of the six did team teaching and were responsible for activities in developmental reading. The other team of three guided reading activities in content areas. Midway through the Institute the two teams exchanged tasks so those who had been engaged in developmental reading activities became involved in reading activities in the content areas and vice-versa. Experiences in both developmental reading and reading in the content areas were provided for each participant.

During the first week of the Institute, each participant chose his own grade level for the Practicum. Practicum work did not begin for the participants until Friday of the first week, so they could get some depth in theory and become acquainted with new materials before moving into the practical aspects of the Institute. This also enabled the master teachers to become better acquainted with the children. Variations in the program occurred each Friday, when the participants observed classes on some grade level other than the one in which they were teaching.

The practicum was organized to achieve three main goals. The first was to develop skill in the diagnostic teaching of reading to children in group situations. We worked with the participants to help them discover the reading needs of their children, select reading activities and materials appropriate for the fulfillment of these needs, and then evaluate their success or lack of it with objective evidence from the children's behavior.

A second major objective of the practicum was to provide the participants with experience in the sequential development of comprehension abilities and reading study skills within their own class and within the school. This was our motive for arranging observation each Friday in classrooms on a grade level different from that in which participants were teaching.

The use of a variety of techniques and materials with different kinds of learners was the third objective. To this end we had chosen superior students for some classes and average students for others.

During the Institute the participants questioned at times the value of being so involved in classroom teaching. They felt that they would rather have more demonstrations by the master teachers and less teaching by themselves. In view of this, it was interesting to read their "in retrospect" evaluations made last December. The practicum took first place as a causative factor in change of their teaching behavior. One of the participants wrote: "I feel I must name the practicum as the most beneficial aspect of the Institute. This is odd because, at the time of the Institute, I felt this part to be the least valuable. However, in retrospect, the opportunity to view and use the various methods and materials in a classroom situation, and to see student reaction to them, has proved invaluable in evaluating their worth to my own situation."

MATERIALS

In addition to classes, discussions, and teaching in the elementary school, the participants spent one period each afternoon examining the newer reading materials, checking out mechanical devices and evaluating

their worth, making tapes and transparencies for use in their classrooms, launching creative projects, and conferring with the staff. Frequently the one period designated on the schedule was voluntarily extended to include others. This was especially true as the Institute passed the mid-mark and participants became concerned that they might miss available opportunities.

EVALUATION

Our Institute had witnessed a great expenditure of human energy. The big question that remained to be answered was "Did the Institute accomplish what we hoped it would?"

The participants were asked to evaluate their experiences at the termination of the Institute and again this past December. One of the most revealing questions asked was, "In retrospect, what was the most significant thing that happened to you during the Clarke Institute?" The following responses are typical of those received:

"My idea of what reading is happens to have gotten completely changed."

"What made the Institute significant for me and far superior to all undergraduate and graduate work previously was the advantage of a lab school for practical purposes. This was extremely helpful."

"Perhaps it was the opportunity for me to acquire knowledge about the basics of reading and learning to apply them effectively thus giving me some assurance and confidence to help others."

I have been of the opinion that most of our problems in education today (discipline, dropouts, etc.) are a result of children not being able to read.

It was most rewarding and inspiring to meet educators from all over the United States who were in earnest to do something about it."

"It was good to be part of a professional group so keenly interested in going forward! The sum total of our courses left an influence that enriches a teacher in such a way that all aspects of her work should show improvement."

"I gained confidence in my own ability to teach. The warmth, enthusiasm and dedication of my fellow participants and the faculty helped me to 'become' as no other single experience in my life. Because of this newly gained self-security I now find myself able to give much more than ever before to my students and my fellow teachers, not only in reading but in love and understanding."

This terminates my report on our attempt to up-grade our elementary teachers of reading through an NDEA Institute. William Gray said one time that a teacher of reading should know the field of reading as thoroughly as any highly competent content teacher knows the field that he teaches. We certainly did not achieve this ideal, but we had started our journey toward it.